

ELDRITCH

LESSONS



STORY AND ART BY
SHAWNA NASH GARRITY

Animalia Chordata Mamalia Omnivera
Hominidae Homomuto Lupis. That's
what Seamus, a.. sort of a tutor of
mine, calls me, when he's talking
about what I am.

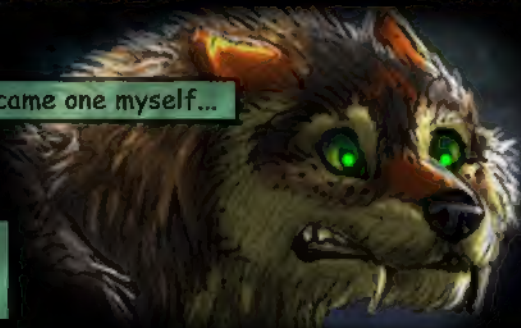


Everyone else just calls me
Faith. And I'm a werewolf. I
just can't get used to that, no
matter how many times I go
over it in my head:



Became one myself...

In the past few
weeks, I was bitten by
a werewolf...



And discover-
ed that
people and
creatures
from mythol-
ogy and folk-
lore were all
real... Well, to
some extent.



This was the point in the few
fantasy novels I'd read where I'd
be whisked away to a special
training facility, magical school, or
something similar, and go on
amazing, grand adventures.



But guess what?
This is real life. It's a
lot less fun.

I get up, and
go to normal,
mundane college,
and deal with
normal, mundane
things.



Then After, I have to go to The
Layline, a local freak club, so I can
learn about being a werewolf, one of
the Eldritch folk.



Today, I'm sup-
posed to get some
"practical" train-
ing out in the
woods from Todd,
a Bzou. That's a...
fairytale wolf...
thing. And...



HE'S LATE.





WELL, I HAD A HUGE MEAL AND DRANK A LOT OF WATER, JUST LIKE HE TOLD ME TO... BUT WHERE IS HE? I WISH I KNEW WHAT HIS HUMAN FORM LOOKS LIKE. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M...

RUSTLE...
RUSTLE...

LOOKING FOR...



YOU COULD TRrrry LOOKING BEHIND YOU, RED. NOT THAT I, RRRRR, MIND THE VIEW FROM HERrrrrrE...



GEEZE TODD, WHY DID YOU COME LOOKING LIKE THAT?

BECAUSE THE ANTHRRRRRO WOLF FORM DRrrrrAWS TOO MUCH ATTENTION...



BUT YOU COULD HAVE COME AS A HUMAN LIKE EVRYONE ELSE DOES. THAT ATTRACTS LESS ATTENTION THAN A TALKING WOLF.



HEH-HEH! I HAVE NO HUMAN FORrrrrrm, RED. BOTH MY PARRRENTS WERE WOLVES, DECENDED FROM THE KINDS OF CREATURES YOU RRRREAD ABOUT IN GRrrrrIM FAIRYTALES.

I MEAN, SURE, SOME WOLVES CAN BECOME HUMAN... BUT NOT ME. I'D LOOK BETTERRRRR LIKE THIS ANYWAY. RRRrrrr, NOW, COME ON, WE'D BETTERRR GET GOING...



HOW DO YOU GET BY WITH NO HUMAN FORM? HOW DO YOU HIDE?

I DO A PRRRRRETTY GOOD HAPPY HUSKY IMPRESSION WHEN I WANT TO. PEOPLE JUST THINK I'M A STRRRRAY. HONESTLY, I THINK I GET ALONG BETTER THAN THOSE WHO CAN APPEAR HUMAN.



HM, YES. YES. HERE'S A GOOD PLACE TO START. TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES AND WE'LL GET THIS RRRRRROLLING.

WHAT? THIS CLOSE TO THE SCHOOL? NO WAY! WHAT IF SOMEONE SAW ME HERE?



I PRRROMISE, NO ONE BUT THAT CAT AND I CAN SEE YOU.

NOPE.



THEN PERHAPS YOU'D LIKE TO RRRRIDE ME?

...I BEG YOUR PARDON?

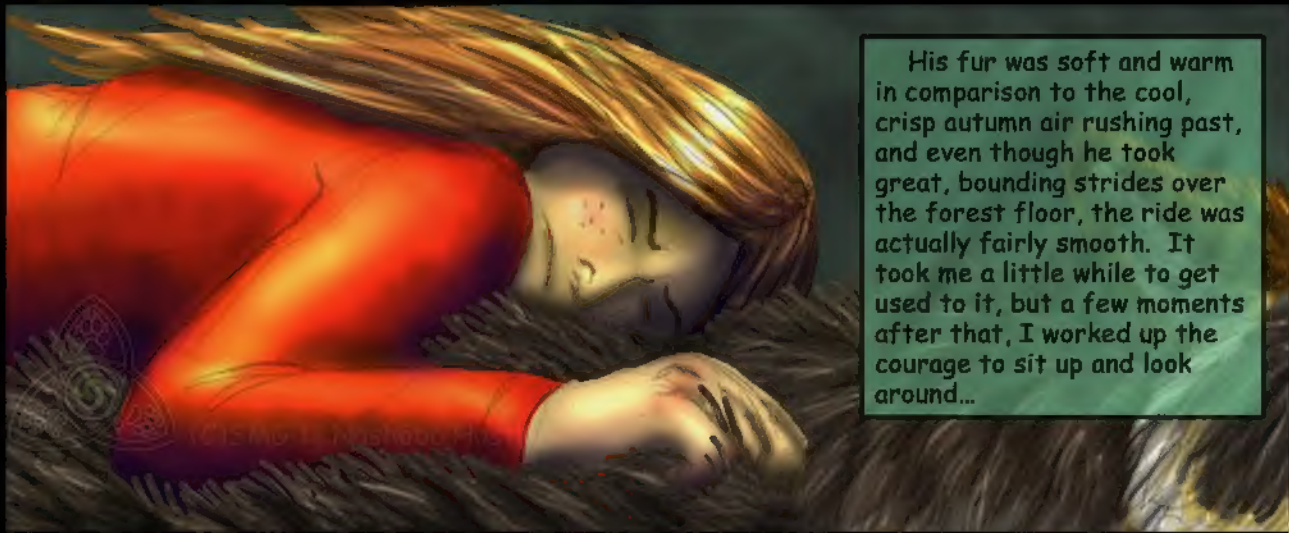
IF YOU WANT TO GO
DEEPER INTO THE WOODS,
IT'S FASTERRRR FOR YOU
TO RRRIDE ME THAN FOR
US TO WALK.

HOW'D... HOW'D
YOU GET SO...

BIG? RRRrrr,
I'M RELATED TO THE BEAST
OF GEVAUDAN. ON MY
MOTHERRR'S SIDE. BIGGEST
BZOU TO EVER LIVE... NOW...
GET ON.







His fur was soft and warm in comparison to the cool, crisp autumn air rushing past, and even though he took great, bounding strides over the forest floor, the ride was actually fairly smooth. It took me a little while to get used to it, but a few moments after that, I worked up the courage to sit up and look around...



I've never ridden a horse, or even a motorcycle, so I had little to compare it to... but this... I had to admit, this was kind of cool.



Okay... maybe really cool.

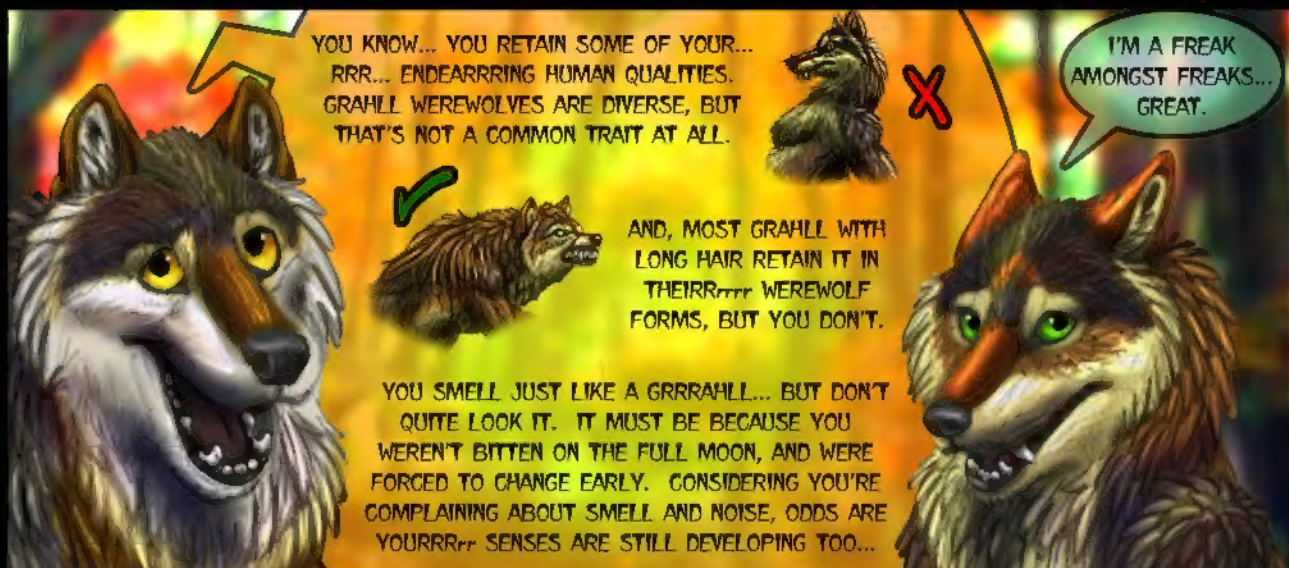
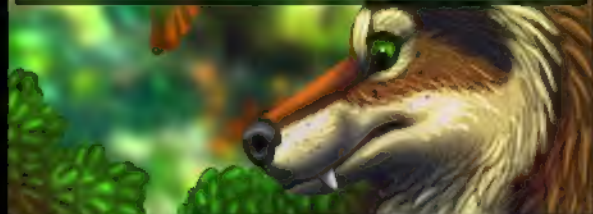
WH-WHOO!



WHOOOOOOOO



As I spoke, it felt weird, the way my fangs hung past my upper lip. Seamus told me they were elongated because they acted like hypodermic needles, kinda like snake fangs. Hollow channels in them connect to glands that produce the werewolf virusie stuff. And if I were to bite someone, the it would be injected into them. It made me wish I could pull them out, or plug them up, so I couldn't ever hurt anyone. Except maybe for the one that bit me, that is.



After shooing Todd away, I was able to get down to this shapeshifting buisness... Seamus was impressed when I told him how I got out of my wolf form the first time. He said all I really needed to do to get back into that shape was to visualize myself as a werewolf, same as how I'd visualized myself as a human.

CRACK

GRNTH

GRIND

The hard part was wrapping my mind around HOW it was done. I think it defies physics... but Seamus says otherwise. According to him, astronomers say that there's this stuff called dark matter, and along with it, dark energy. I don't remember the details (I mean, really, who can remember all that guy says?), but this stuff is almost undetectable, save for how it affects gravitational pull and stuff like that. According to him, though most don't know it yet, there's bits of this dark-stuff everywhere.

Regardless, Seamus told me that there are specialized organelles called aterplasts in most of the cells in shapeshifting beings. You know. Like me. They collect and store dark energy, converting it into some enzymish thing called adeno... adenosine triphos... oh, I don't remember; he sometimes shortened it to ATP, though.

Anyway, apparently the organelles use dark energy to take dark matter and convert into normal matter. In addition, he said something about "borrowing" matter and energy from the "other side of leylines." I still don't understand what the heck he means by that. However, he says it means that I don't create or destroy matter when I change size... just convert it. Or something like that.

Regardless of how it's done.... It's strange. But what else can you say about turning into a monster wolf? It looks like I get all genetically mutated... but once again, Seamus said otherwise. He said that the transformation wasn't mutating my genes... that the lycanthrope pathogen thing had already changed them, and that the transformation was "only" a change in how those genes were physically shown... He said it was like... I dunno. It had something to do with what causes cells to develop into skin or eye or muscle cells, even when they all have the same DNA. Something about "histones" turning genes on and off. I don't know what a histone looks like, but all I can picture is a guy beating a gene into the "off" position with a rock. Histones. His Stones. Get it?

... THIS IS STILL JUST TOO WEIRD

... Yeah, I'll keep my day job.



AWWWWWK! DID I MISS ALL OF THE FUN ALREADY? ARE WE LATE?



MAGGIE!
YOU'RE NOT
GOING TO BE
IN THAT BIRD
FORM ALL
DAY ARE YOU?

I'M USING A LESS
CONSPICUOUS FORM, LIKE
YOU SHOULD BE. BESIDES,
I THINK ONE 'PAIR' IS
ENOUGH FOR YOU.



~~EVEN THOUGH TODD SAID
WE'D BE A DISTRACTION... I
THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE SOME
FRIENDS ABOUT, PAITH.~~

DYLAN... IS THAT YOU? I
MEAN... YOU-YOU, NOT
SUBCONSCIOUS-YOU?



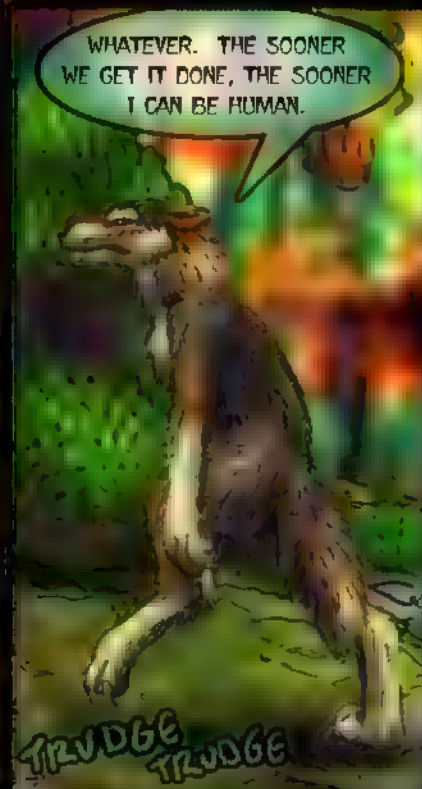
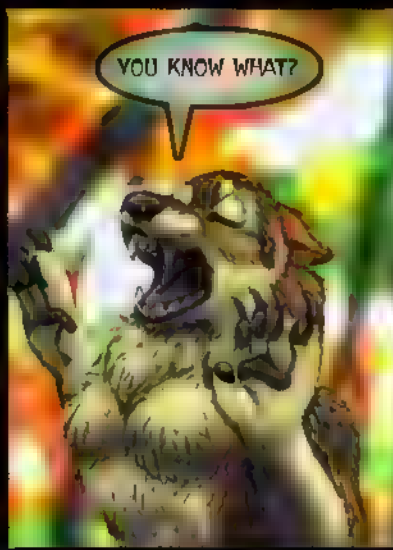
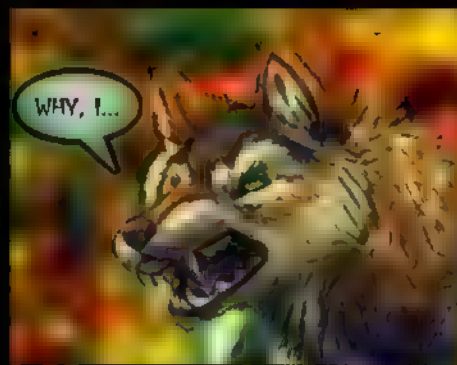
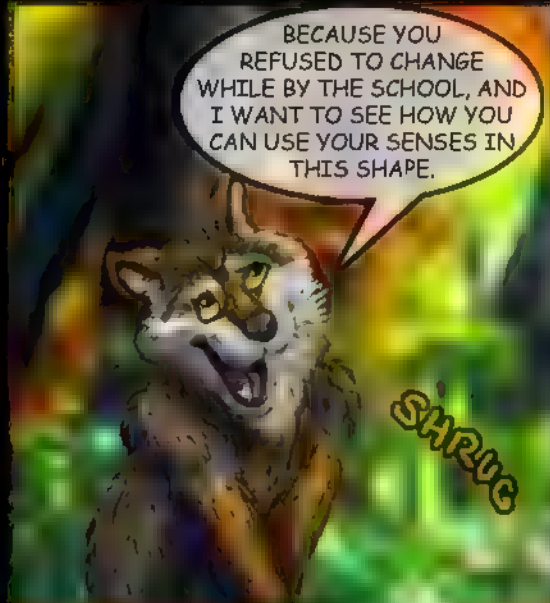
OH SURE, THIS
ASTRAL PROJECTION
THING COMES IN
HANDY. I MEAN, I'M
NOT VERY GOOD AT IT
YET. I CAN'T PHYSI-
CALLY INTERACT WITH
ANYTHING LIKE SOME
PEOPLE WITH
FETCHES CAN... BUT
THAT ALSO MEANS I
CAN'T GET HURT.



BUT THEN... WHERE
THE SNOT IS THE,
WELL... NORMAL YOU?

IN MY BED AT HOME,
OF COURSE.

OH. OF COURSE.

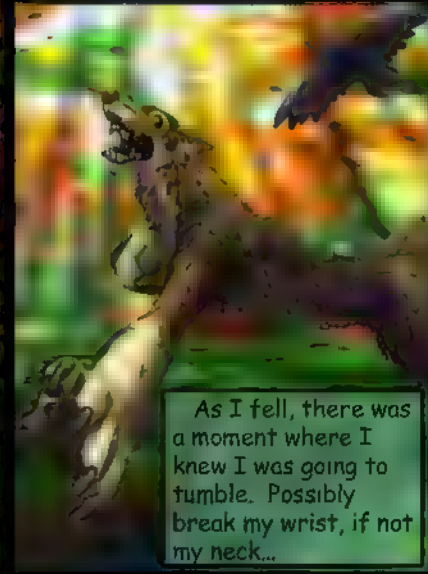
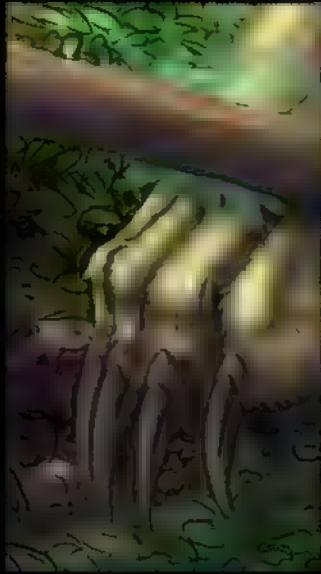




I AM NOT A
SLOWPOKE!



Somehow, walking on two legs was easy enough . It was sort of like walking on a balance beam, on your toes. But running felt a little awkward. I'd run on all fours earlier, I remembered it... but that felt so... animal. I was human, I didn't need to resort to moving like a ... a monster.



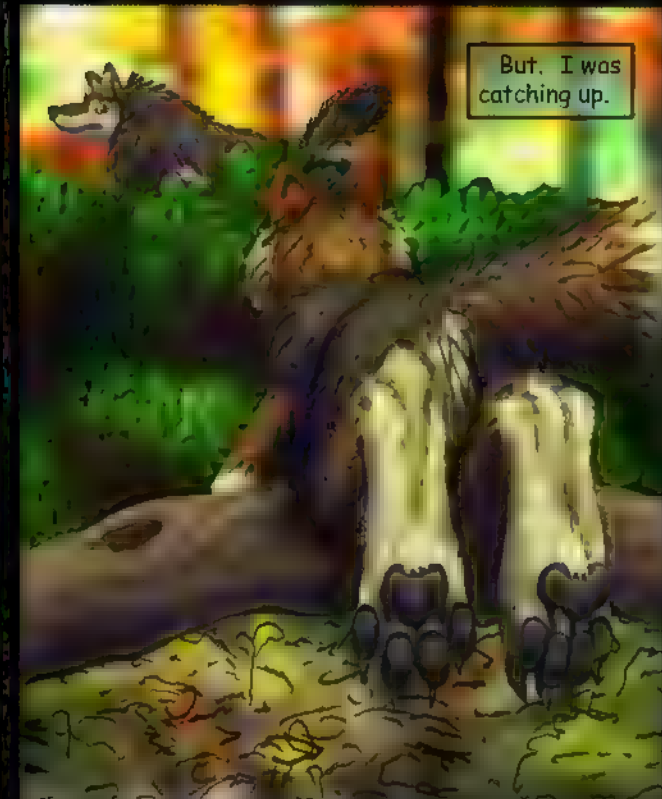
As I fell, there was a moment where I knew I was going to tumble. Possibly break my wrist, if not my neck...



But then, somehow... I wasn't hurt.

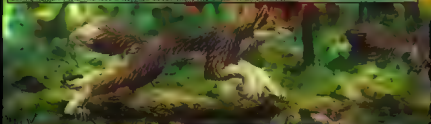


I was still moving. And... in spite of all of this... I wasn't tired. The running felt awkward for a moment, unnatural. Humans didn't move like this. I didn't move like this.

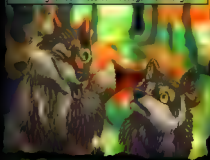


But. I was catching up.

The more I ran, the more something began to feel a little different. I don't know how to explain it. I felt less conflicted, the way I was running bothered me less. It seemed normal. I began to worry less about acting human, and the less I worried about that, the easier it all became.



Last time I'd been so confused and hungry, everything about this had been miserable. I hated what I had become, and I hated myself. So, of course, I found myself wanting to hate this. But well fed, and in the daylight, it felt kind of good. All my life, I'd never really been athletic. I'd go for short jogs now and again, but I couldn't manage it for long.



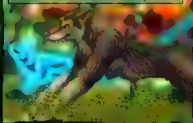
I was always the kid lagging behind in cross country, always the last to be picked for the soccer team, because I wore out after a while. But now... my breath came smoothly and easily. The less I thought about it, the easier my feet, no, my paws found the ground and propelled me forward. The mere act of running felt almost effortless, and what effort it took felt good.



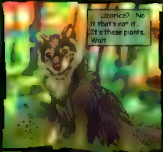
And then it hit me. This must be what it felt like to fly.



Almost lost in the sensation of the run, I was almost startled when I smelled something familiar



Licorice? No it that's not it. It's these plants. Wait



I remember these flowers. I saw them after I was mowed!



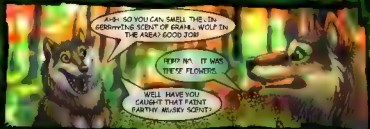
I THINK I WAS TAKEN SOMEWHERE THROUGH HERE.



A-H! SO YOU CAN SMELL THE LINGERING SCENT OF BRAHLL WOLF IN THE AREA? GOOD JOB!

HEED NO. IT WAS THESE FLOWERS.

WELL HAVE YOU CAUGHT THAT PAINT EARTHY MUSKY SCENT?



U. IS THAT HOW ALL WEREWOLVES SMELL?

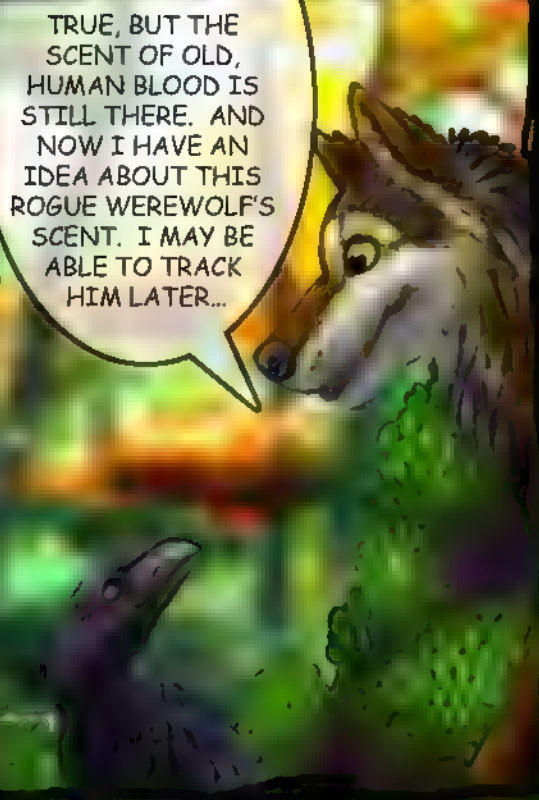
OH YEAH

I THOUGHT SOMETHING SMELLED URGY





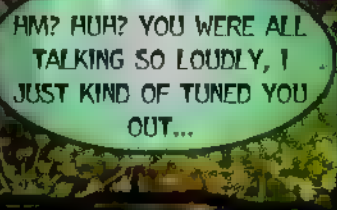
WELL, IF YOU WERE
ATTACKED OVER
HERE, JUST PAST
THE FLOWERS, THERE
DOESN'T SEEM TO
BE A LOT OF EVIDENCE LEFT FROM
THE ATTACK... I MAY
HAVE A PARTIAL
PRINT; BUT, JAYZUS,
THIS WAS OVER A
MONTH AGO...



TRUE, BUT THE
SCENT OF OLD,
HUMAN BLOOD IS
STILL THERE. AND
NOW I HAVE AN
IDEA ABOUT THIS
ROGUE WEREWOLF'S
SCENT. I MAY BE
ABLE TO TRACK
HIM LATER...



AND, FAITH'S LEARNED A LITTLE
ABOUT USING HER NOSE.



HM? HUH? YOU WERE ALL
TALKING SO LOUDLY, I
JUST KIND OF TUNED YOU
OUT...



APPARENTLY, SHE
NEEDS WORK ON HER
EARS, THOUGH.



AWWWK-HA-HAA

WELL, WE ALSO NEED TO GET HER PRACTICED IN CHANGING INTO A NORRRMAL WOLF SHAPE, NOT JUST THIS HYBRID FORM

WOAH, WOAH, WOAH! HOLD UP... WOLF FORM? AS IN, NO OPPOSABLE THUMBS?

YOU PROBABLY WON'T BE ABLE TO TALK EITHER, BUT, RRRrrrr IT'S A GOOD ABILITY TO HAVE, BECAUSE IT'S LESS CON-

NO. NONONONO. I AM NOT GIVING UP SPEECH AND THUMBS. I MEAN, WHAT IF I NEED TO ASK YOU A QUESTION ABOUT HOW TO CHANGE BACK?

OH, IT'D BE JUST THE SAME AS CHANGING BACK FRRROM YOUR CURRENT FORM.

I STILL DON'T WANT TO.

BUT IF YOU'RE SEEN IN THIS-

I'M MONSTER ENOUGH AS IS FOR ONE DAY, THANK YOU VERY MUCH. I DON'T NEED TO ADD TO IT.

MAYBE THAT'S ENOUGH FOR
ONE DAY... WE... WE
SHOULDN'T STAY HERE.
LET'S FIND SOMEPLACE FOR
FAITH TO REST AND GET
SOMETHING TO EAT...

HEY!

I'M SURE
MOM WOULD BE
HAPPY TO FIX SOME-
THING FOR US, AND
SHE'S RIGHT ACROSS
THE WOODS... SHE
SAYS THAT SINCE
WE'RE ROOMIES AND
ALL, THAT SHE'D
LOVE TO--

WAIT.
IF SHE LIVES
SO CLOSE,
HOW COME
YOU LIVE IN A
DORM?

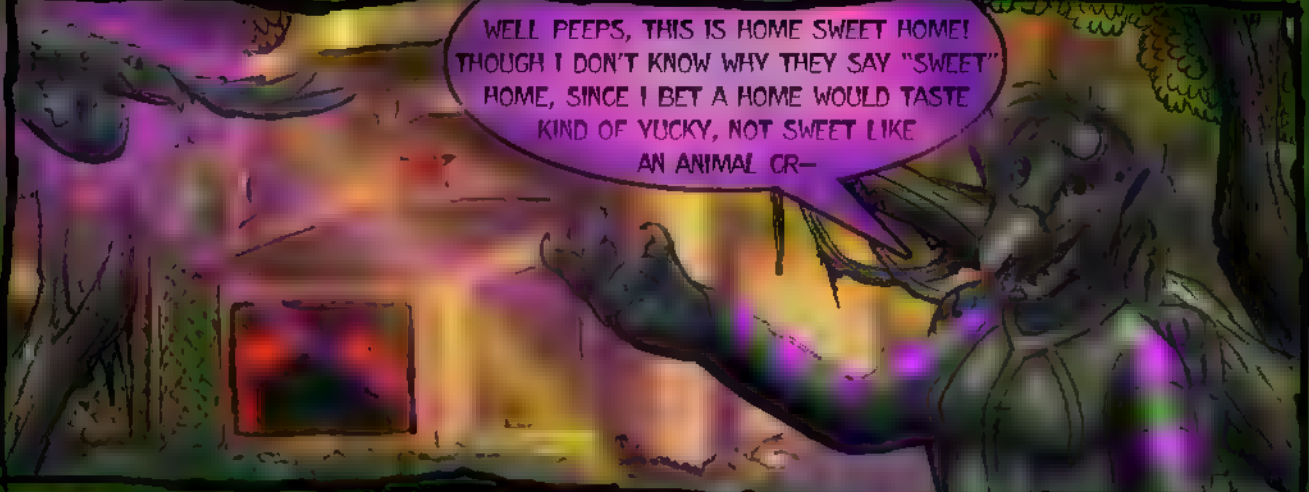
SHE SAYS IT'LL BE
A GOOD EXPERIENCE
FOR ME.

I BET SHE JUST
WANTED YOU OUT OF
THE HOUSE.

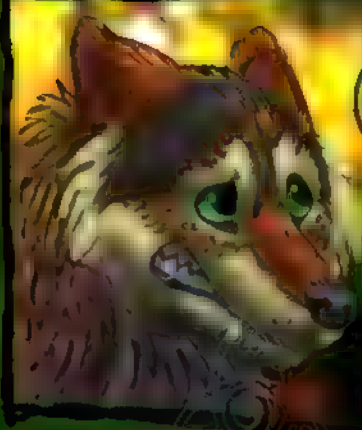
WELL,
JAY-ZUES, DO
YOU KNOW WHAT
I BET?

I BET CROWS FLY FASTER
THAN WOLVES RUN!

Seriously? Again with the
running? I thought this was
werewolf training, not P.E. class.



WELL PEEPS, THIS IS HOME SWEET HOME!
THOUGH I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY SAY "SWEET"
HOME, SINCE I BET A HOME WOULD TASTE
KIND OF YUCKY, NOT SWEET LIKE
AN ANIMAL CR—



UM, MAGGIE?
AREN'T WE GONNA
FREAK OUT YOUR
MOM?

HUH? WHY
WOULD WE—

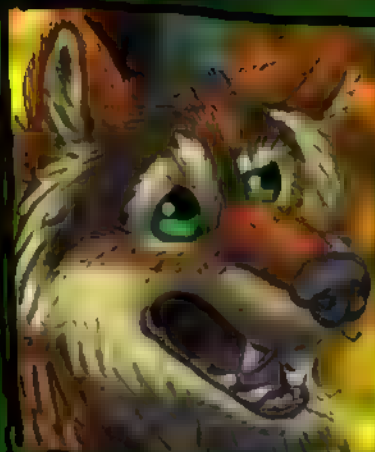


FAITH!

IS THAT YOU?
IT'S GOOD TO SEE
YOU AGAIN!



MY DAUGHTER
HAS TOLD ME SO
MUCH ABOUT
YOU. WHICH IS
GOOD SINCE YOU
SKIPPED OUT ON
YOUR RETURN
CHECKUP



SO THAT'S
HOW MAGGIE
KNEW I'D BEEN
ATTACKED!



... SO MUCH FOR PATIENT
CONFIDENTIALITY, DR. K.



OH, SIMMER
DOWN, FAITH. I
DIDN'T TELL HER
IT WAS YOU SPE-
CIFICALLY...

YOU SEE, YOU HAD WITCH HAZEL LEAVES IN YOUR HAIR WHEN YOU CAME IN, AND THIS FOREST IS THE ONLY PLACE WITCH HAZEL GROWS COMMONLY AROUND HERE. YOU WERE SO SCARED TOO, MUMBLING ABOUT DYING EVEN THOUGH I KEPT SAYING NOT YET YOU WEREN'T. ANYWAY, I DIDN'T WANT MAGGIE OUT IN THE WOODS IF SOMETHING NAUGHTY WAS OUT AND ABOUT, SO I TOLD HER SOMEONE WAS ATTACKED.

OH... I GUESS THAT MAKES SENSE.

SEE? EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON. SPEAKING OF WHICH, I SUSPECT THE REASON MAGGIE BROUGHT YOU BY IS BECAUSE SOMEONE'S HUNGRY?

YEAH!

While everyone busied themselves either helping DR. well, Maggie's Mom, I looked about her garden..

She even had some of those good smelling flowers by her tomatoes!

ADMIRING MY FENNEL, FAITH?

WELL, I SUPPOSE AS HERBS GO, IT'S A GOOD ONE FOR A WEREWOLF TO LIKE. IT REPELS FLEAS.

IT SMELLS GREAT. LIKE LICORICE... I LOVE LICORICE.

It was weird, sitting in the garden and eating with everyone. Well, except Dylan turned out, his astral projection couldn't interact with physical stuff much, let alone eat. But... it was all so normal. Everyone chatted cheerfully, Maggie's Mom asking me about school, Todd yammering about dragons from someplace that sounded like some tropical town while Maggie teased Dylan. I... hadn't felt so relaxed since I'd been bitten.



JUST CALL ME MOM DEAR, EVERYONE ELSE DOES.

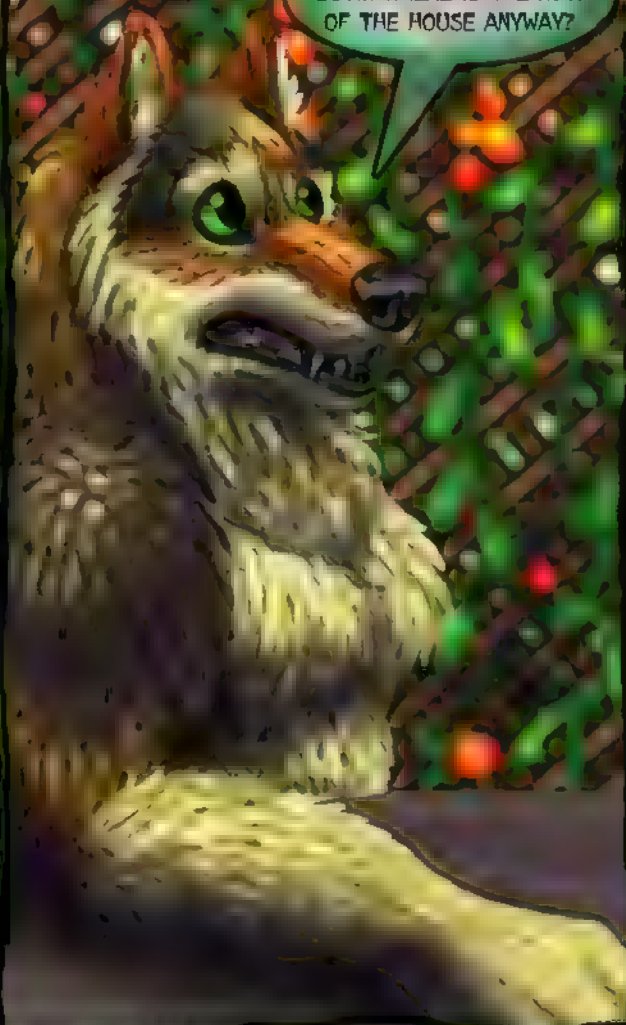
SO, UM, DR—

ER... MAGGIE'S MOM? ARE YOU A... YOU KNOW. LIKE YOUR DAUGHTER?



OH NO, I'M HUMAN. IT TURNS OUT THAT HER FATHER WAS A BIT OF A CROW SHAPESHIFTER, THOUGH, AND I HAD A LITTLE KARASUTENGU IN ME... AND THAT RESULTED IN OUR UNIQUE LITTLE CROWTENGU MAGGIE HERE. IT MEANS SHE'S A VERY TALENTED SHAPESHIFTER... WELL, ONLY SO LONG AS CROW FEATURES ARE INVOLVED.

OH, THAT EXPLAINS A LOT... WHERE IS THE MAN OF THE HOUSE ANYWAY?



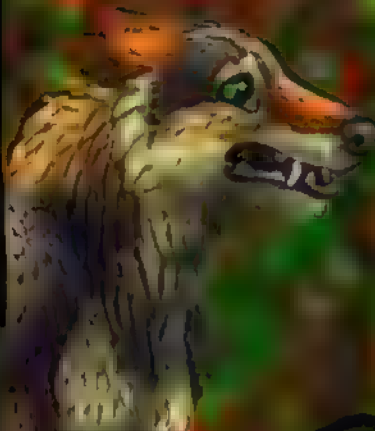
OH, HE.



HE PASSED AWAY. A LONG TIME AGO.

Oops. So, um... not so relaxed now





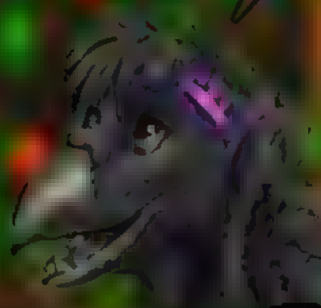
OH, I'M SO SORRY, I—



OH, HUSH UP
NOW BEFORE I
STUFF A COOKIE
IN YOUR
MUZZLE



HEH. COOKIES



I BET YOU DIDN'T SEE THIS
COMING, DID YOU, FAITH?



SEE? THIS WEREWOLF STUFF
ISN'T AS BAD AS YOU THOUGHT
IT WAS GOING TO BE, IS IT?



HEY, HOW COME FAITH'S
THE ONLY ONE WHO'S
THREATENED WITH
COOKIES?



FZZZTHH



WELL JAVZUSE,
HAVE A COOKIE ALREADY!

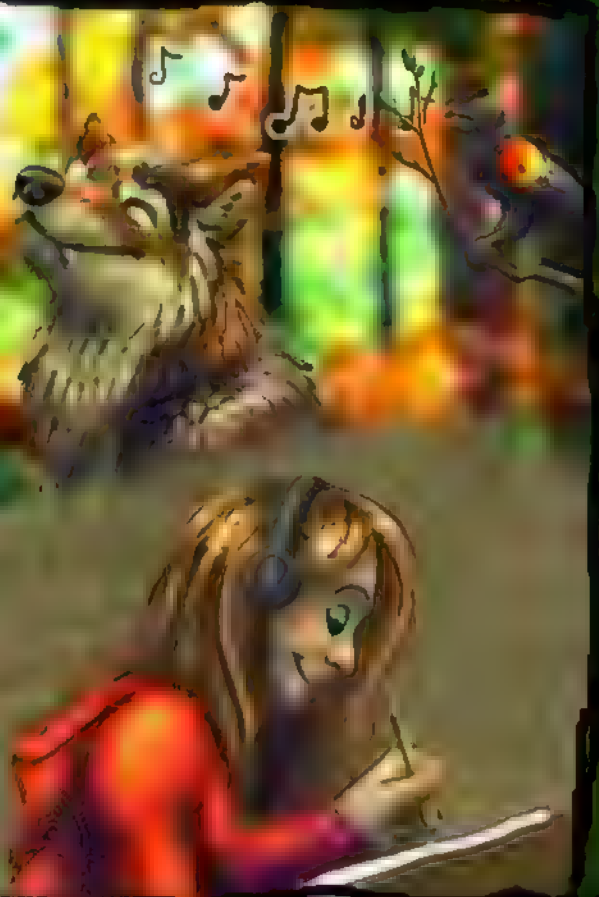


WELL, I GUESS IT
COULD BE WORSE!

And... that was my first day of werewolf training. After that, every day after work or class, I'd either go to the Layline and learn about the Eldritch world from Seamus, or go out to the woods. The weird thing is that at first I preferred listening to Seamus drone on because I got to stay human... But, the more time passed, the more I liked my time in the woods. Maybe I liked it because at the end, I got to visit Maggie's Mom's house and feel... normal, even though I was less normal than ever.

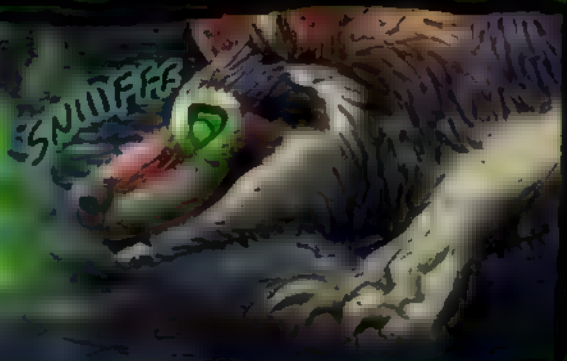
As it turned out, the more time I spent in the werewolf shape, the better my senses became. At first it was disjointed, everything smelling too strong, voices sounding too loud... but I adjusted. You see, I was used to sight and hearing... but I'd never heard like this before. When I first Changed, there hadn't been much difference... and then, (according to Seamus) the wolf part of my mind developed and began tuning the auditory input from my ears, which is why everything was just so loud and uncomfortable for a while. But now... it seemed less harsh, more refined.

Have you ever listened to a stream before? I mean, really listened? It's like music! You can pick out different pitches and notes in the way it burbles, and then, you can pay attention to other things, like the distant drumbeat of a woodpecker's bill, and the whistling of the wind through the grasses of a nearby field. Heck, my grades in my Music Appreciation class even started to climb because I could better pick out the pitches for notes if I listened as a wolf too.

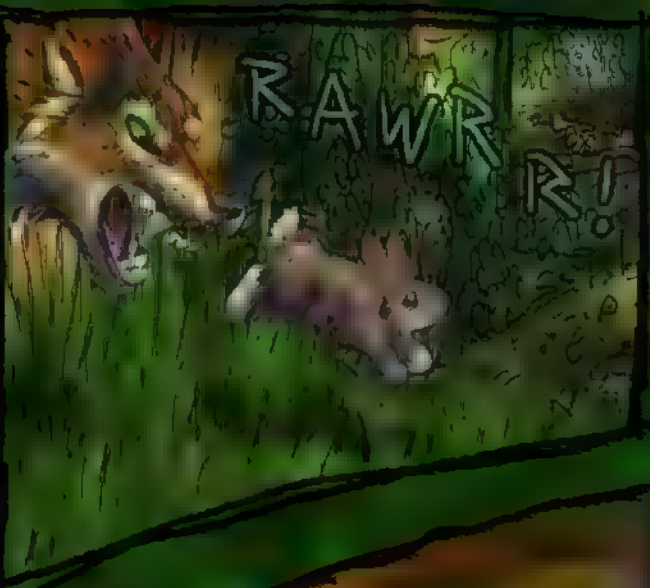


And then... there was smell. That took a little longer to start developing. At first it was kind of like walking into a scented candle shop... It was kind of overwhelming, and I could only distinguish certain, strong scents, like fennel. But then... then I started to be able to pick out individual scents. Like, a couple of months ago I would have told you all pine trees smelled the same. SO not true! Like, fir trees smell more sour; and spruce smell more spicy, and the cones smell more musky and the bark... you know, I don't know if there's even a word for that smell.

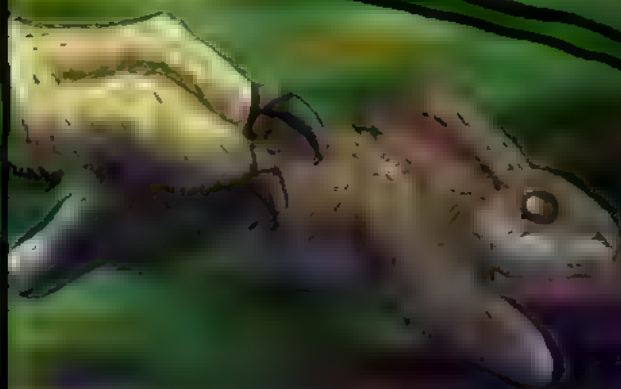
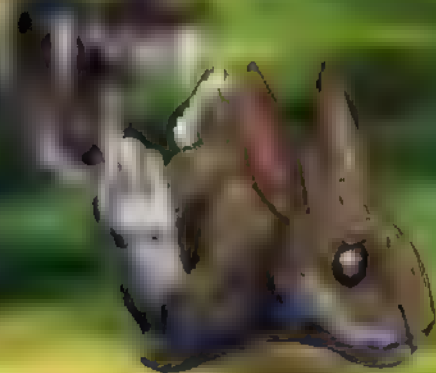
And you know, while at first, some things smelled bad, now... Well, there were scents that were easier on my nose than others, but nothing smelled outright bad... because even the scents I once thought smelled bad were becoming so complex and interesting!



At night my vision was so much better... but in the day-light, it was about the same.



And while it took some time to get my mind wrapped around some things...



Other things were too easy to get used to.



Such concerns, however, were balanced by the mundane aspects of my strangely stable and predictable human life. They also made for a welcome distraction...

...SO, AFTER I GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH THIS GUY WANTING ME FOR SOME RESEARCH JOB, I GOT BACK TO THE COMPUTER AND HAD MY GUY WHIP OUT THUNDER-FURY, MY BEST WEAPON, AND THEN I WAS JUST PWNING THESE NOOBS WITHOUT EVEN TRYING!

JAY, AS MUCH AS I LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR GAMING... IT'S TIME FOR ME TO CLOCK OUT. I HAVE LITERATURE HOMEWORK TO DO.

AND JAY?

YEAH?

THANKS FOR BEING SO NORMAL.

The time it took me to get to and from work was getting shorter; I was able to keep up a better pace these days than I used to. I wasn't sure if it was because I was so active these days, or because I was a werewolf...

Regardless, soon I was seated in my dorm, working on my assignment: Finding a poem that I felt applied to my life....

22 WILDERNESS

THERE is a wolf in me ... fangs pointed for tearing gashes ... a red tongue for raw meat ... and the hot lapping of blood—I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and the wilderness will not let it go.

Wow, when Seamus told me that there were several successful werewolves in history, I didn't believe him. Maybe he was right about werewolf presidents and... and oh man, I'm late for my lesson with Seamus!

After arriving late, I found that the inside of the Layline was, as usual, a haze of movement, joy, and music. Tonight, electric music, and I do mean electric. Some critter called a Sand Squink was using lightning bolts to make pitches and notes. Once, Seamus referred to the Layline as a "Pocket." A space within a space, or something like that. I guess that's why it seemed like a little porn shop on the outside, but a club big enough to house dragons on the inside. Or maybe that was the Glamour? I can never keep it all straight, because while he's always excited about what he's talking about, after a while, I stop paying attention. Why? Because he never STOPS talking..

WELL, FAITH, ACCORDING TO MY RESEARCH, ODDS ARE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO RETAIN MOST OF YOUR LUPINE SENSES WHILE IN YOUR HUMAN SHAPE WITH TIME, BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY ESTIMATES FOR HOW LONG IT MIGHT TAKE, GIVEN YOUR UNUSUAL DEVELOPMENT

YOU KNOW, GAOTH AND I JUST BOUGHT A BUILDING ADJACENT TO THE WOODS, AND I PLAN ON MAKING IT A SAFEHOUSE OF SORTS FOR THE ELDRITCH FOLK AROUND HERE... A PARANORMAL CENTER, IF YOU WILL

WE'LL HAVE EVERYTHING, TESTING FACILITIES AND LABS, ID CARDS, AND... WELL, I'D LOVE TO BE ABLE TO DO SOME TESTS AND STUDY YOUR PROGRESSION--

SEAMUS? DO SOUNDS OR SMELLS EVER REMIND YOU OF COLORS?

COLORS?

YEAH. LIKE... SOME THINGS I SMELL, AND IT FEELS LIKE A COLOR. LIKE... MAGGIE SMELLS LIKE... WELL, LIKE MAGGIE, AND SHE SMELLS LIKE BIRDS, BUT SHE ALSO SMELLS LIKE PURPLE. AND DYLAN SOUNDS HUMAN, AND ALSO KIND OF SWEET, BUT HE ALSO SOUNDS BLUE...

OH, YOU MEAN SYNAESTHESIA!

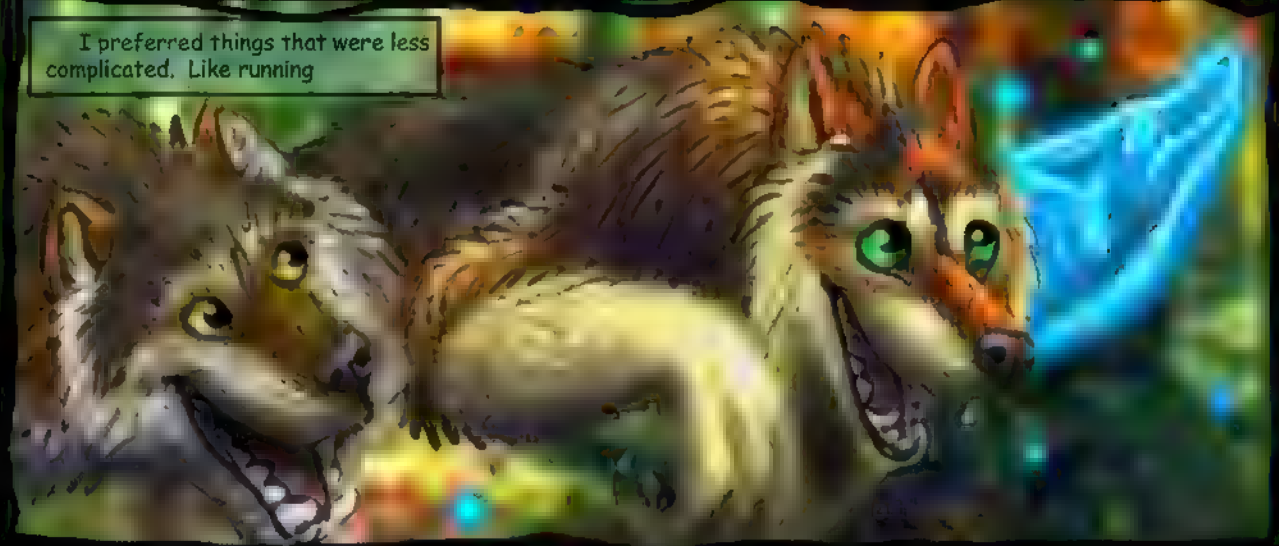
BLESS YOU?

HA-HA, FUNNY. SYNAESTHESIA, FAITH IT'S A TERM FOR WHEN A STIMULUS OF ONE SORT CAUSES AN INVOLUNTARY, AUTOMATIC EXPERIENCE OF AN ALTERNATE SENSORY IMPRESSION. I SUPPOSE IT MAKES SENSE THOUGH HUMANS ARE SIGHT-BASED ORGANISMS, WITH POOR SENSES OF SMELL. AND WITH YOU BEING AN ART MAJOR, IT ONLY MAKES SENSE THAT THE DEVELOPING LUPINE INSTINCTS WOULD USE VISUAL CUES AS A SORT OF TRANSLATOR TO HELP YOU IDENTIFY SPECIFIC SCENTS...

DYLAN? TEA, PLEASE. EARL GREY. HOT.

When will I learn to stop asking questions that might have complicated answers?

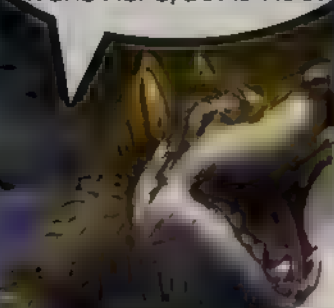
I preferred things that were less complicated. Like running



WOW...



SEVERAL LEY LINES INTERSECT AT THIS WATERFALL. THAT'S WHY IT'S SO LUSH



THIS PLACE HAS BEEN
PRRRRRRETTY DEVOID OF
LYCANTHROPES SINCE THE
WOLVES OF THE WOODS
WERE HERE, LONG AGO.

YAWN



WOLVES OF
THE WOODS?
MAGGIE MEN-
TIONED THAT
ONCE...

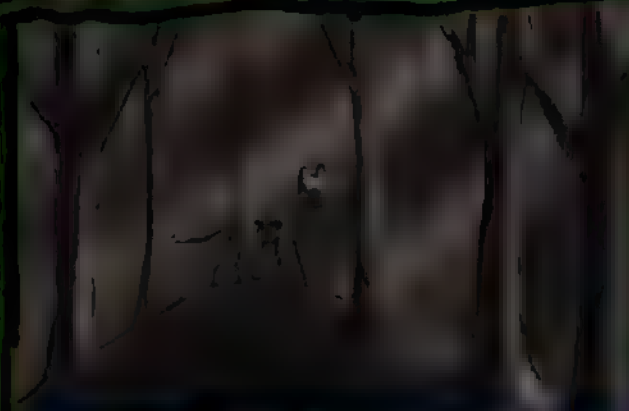


WELL, FAITH, THE WOLVES OF THE WOODS WERE A
PACK OF YOUNG WERRRRREWOLVES THAT LIVED IN
THE FORESTS OF THIS AREA. AT FIRST, IT WAS
JUST A COUPLE, WHO LOVED ONE ANOTHER VERY,
VERY MUCH. BUT THEN, ONE OF THEIR FRIENDS
CAME DOWN WITH CANCER. THEY INFECTED HER
WITH LYCANTHROPY, IN HOPES THAT IT WOULD
CURE HERRR. AND IT DID. BUT...

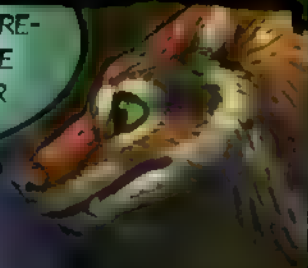
THE GIRL, SHE COULDN'T HANDLE BEING A WEREWOLF.
SHE KILLED SOMEONE. THE POLICE NEVER CAME FOR
HER, BUT PEOPLE HAD BEEN CATCHING GLIMPSES OF
THEM IN THE WOODS FORRRR SOME TIME. THAT'S
HOW THE PACK GOT ITS NAME. IT'S WHAT THE LOCALS
CALLED THEM, THOUGH MOST THOUGHT THEM TO BE A
FIGMENT OF PEOPLE'S IMAGINATION. BUT WHEN A BOY
TURNED UP LOOKING LIKE HE'D BEEN MAULED BY A
DOG, THE LOCALS STARTED A SEARCH FOR THEM, AIDED
BY HUNTERS AND GUN ENTHUSIASTS FROM ALL DIREC-
TIONS. FAYLEN, THE ONE WHO COULDN'T HANDLE
BEING A WERRRRREWOLF, WELL, SHE FLED.



WAIT, I THOUGHT WERE-
WOLVES HAD TO BE
SHOT WITH SILVER
BULLETS?



THE OTHER GIRL, LOREN, WAS KILLED. THEY
SAY THAT SHE WAS SKINNED, TOSSED
INTO A JEEP AND THEY HEADED SOUTH.
TRAVIS, THE BOY, WAS NEVER SEEN AGAIN.
AND SO, THESE WOODS HAVE BEEN VACANT
OF WOLVES EVERRR SINCE. EXCEPT FOR THE
FEW TIMES I PASS THROUGH.



OH, SILVER'LL KILL WEREWOLVES BEST.
LOTS OF ELDRRRRITCH WOLF SPECIES,
BZOU INCLUDED, HAVE SILVER ALLERGIES.
HOWEVER, ANY BULLET THAT DOES
ENOUGH DAMAGE TO THE BRAIN OR
HEART'LL DO IT TOO.

BUT ENOUGH
OF THAT DEPRESS-
ING STORY! YOU
KNOW, YOU'VE
DONE PRRETTY
WELL.

THE ONLY THING
YOU'RE STILL
GIVING ME GRIEF
ABOUT IS TRYING
TO CHANGE INTO
A WOLF FORM.

SO, I'LL TELL YOU
WHAT. TODAY WE'RE
TAKING A DAY OFF.
WE'RRRE JUST GOING
TO RELAX, HANG,
CHILL. MAYBE PLAY
SOME GAMES.

GAMES?

PEEK!

TAG YOU'RE IT!

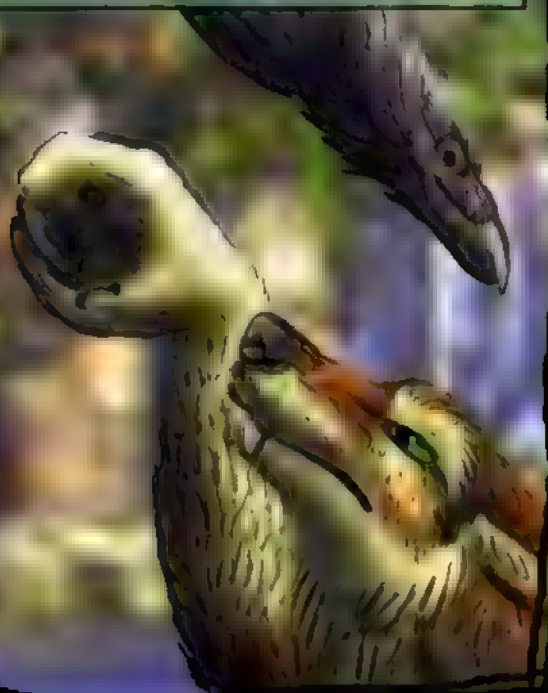
HEY, THAT'S NOT FAIR!
YOU CAN FLY!

HEEHEEHEE

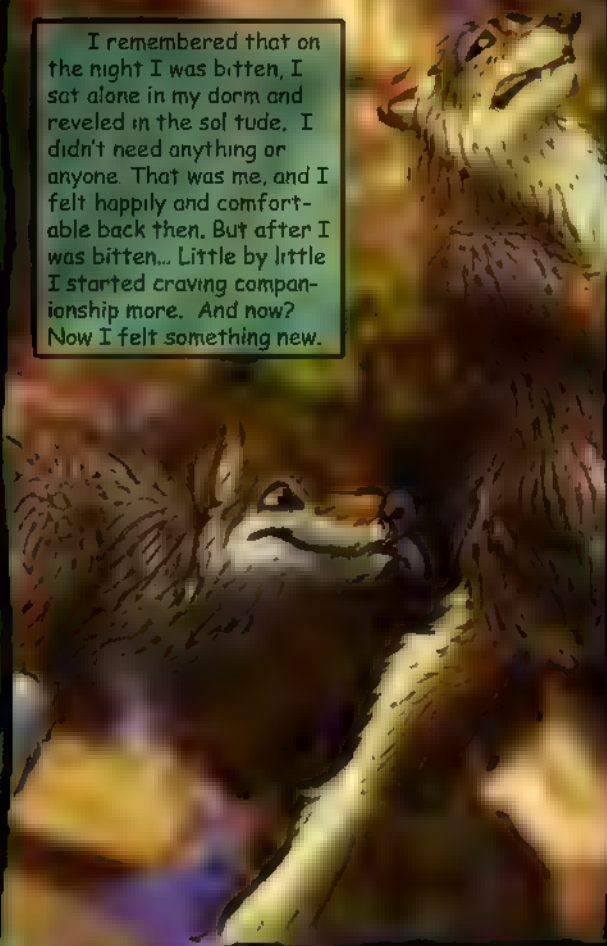
HA!

AWK!

It wasn't until just then that I realized something. Sure the ease of movement, the still-improving senses, that stuff was neat and all. but what I was really enjoying was being with these freaks. Weird, right? I mean even though I was a flipping werewolf, running around in the same woods I'd been attacked in, I felt calm, comfortable. I felt safe around them. Even if they got on my nerves now and again.



I remembered that on the night I was bitten, I sat alone in my dorm and reveled in the solitude. I didn't need anything or anyone. That was me, and I felt happy and comfortable back then. But after I was bitten... Little by little I started craving companionship more. And now? Now I felt something new.



I felt like I belonged





RRRRRRRR
NOW THISLL CHALLENGE YOUR SENSES
WE'RE GOING TO PLAY
ANOTHERRR HUMAN
GAME HIDE AND SEEK
SO, WE'RE ALL GOING
TO HIDE, AND YOU
COUNT TO FIFTY

HEY, I THINK I'LL
BE ABLE TO SHUFF YOU GUYS
FROM BEHIND. THINKER.



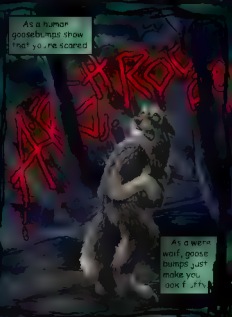
FORTY EIGHT

FORTY NINE

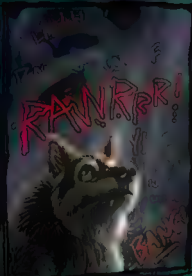
FIFTY
READY OR NOT
GUYS



As a human
goosebumps show
that you're scared



As a were
wolf, goose
bumps just
make you
look fluffy



I heard someplace that when you're about to die, your whole life flashes before your eyes

BANG!!
BANG!!



Funny thing... instead, I found that what actually flashed through my mind was how I'd thought how my life was going to be

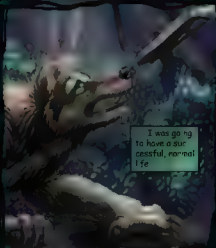


I had it all worked out

Art school, a good job



Then maybe a husband and kids



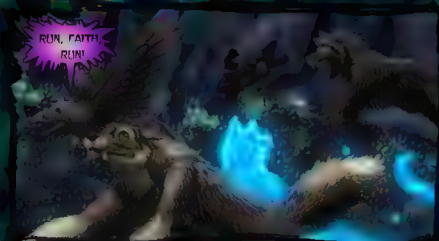
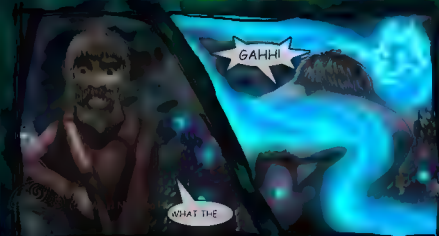
I was going to have a successful, normal life

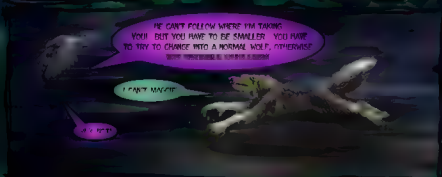
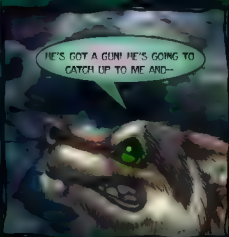
CLACK!!



RRRRRRRR
P PRRRLEEEASE

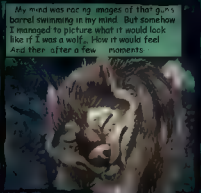
It's a p.t., plans rarely work out as they should







Even in my panic
I could tell she had
a point. But the
thing was changing
required focus.



My mind was racing images of that gun's
barrel swimming in my mind. But somehow
I managed to picture what it would look
like if I was a wolf. How it would feel.
And then after a few moments.



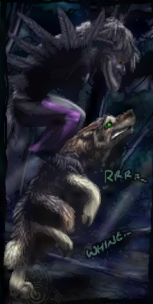
Then I was out
running the wind.
Smaller and sleeker,
I raced along even
in the thickening
underbrush and the
steep incline that
would have given my
larger form trouble.
Trees were blurs to
either side. The
ground rushed past
beneath me. And
then.



YELP!

The ground was GONE.





LOOK, OKAY, MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE WARNED YOU... BUT YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE DONE IT IF I TOLD YOU TO. AND DOWN HERE, YOU'RE SHOOTED FROM STRAY BULLETS, AND HEY, LOOK! TODD'S BEEN WAITING TO GET YOU INTO A WOLF FORM FOR AGES AND...

RROOIIIRRRRRRRK

GRRR

FAITH?

RAWR-GROOWR!

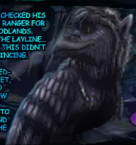
FAITH, TALKING LOUDER IS NOT GOING TO MAKE ME UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO TELL ME.

RAWRR

TODD GOT THE GUY! KNOCKED HIM GROUND AND CHECKED HIS ID. IT TURNS OUT MR. DICK BACK THERE IS A RANGER FOR THE PARK THAT MEETS THE SCHOOL'S WOODLANDS. TODD'S TAKING HIM BACK TO SEE GAOH AT THE LAYLINE. HE'S GOING TO NEED TO BE CONVINCED THAT THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN, BUT THE FAE CAN BE VERY CONVINCING.



HE HAS A PICTURE OF A RED-HAIRED BOY IN HIS WALLET. TOO, SO WE'LL HAVE TO FIND OUT IF THE KID SAW ANYTHING TOO. AND ENCOURAGE THE RANGER TO GET RID OF HIS GUNS AND SHOULD STAY OUT OF THE WOODS.



ORRWA?

SO, TODD'S A-OKAY?

WELL, HE GOT A BULLET BURN. IT JUST GRAZED HIM. IT WAS A NORMAL ROUND THOUGH, SO HE'S ALRIGHT. EVEN IF IT HAD BEEN SILVER IT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN TOO BADLY OFF, BUT--

BUT, I GUESS THAT'S ENOUGH HIDE AND SEEK FOR ONE EVENING. MUM? I'LL HELP YOU GET YOUR CLOTHES AND GET HOME, THEN THE BOYS AND I WILL CLEAN UP THE MESS. OKAY, FAITH?



The wolf form had been odd... I didn't think quite like I normally did. It was... well, wolfy. Now, part of me thinks I physically had the ability to have made noises that sounded like what I wanted to say, but at the time, while I understood words, piecing them together myself was difficult. My thoughts were governed more by memories of things and sensory input and gut feelings.

Either way, once I was human again, I was able to properly express my dislike of Maggie's little plan.



The next morning, the weird and scary reality I was living made my workday seem surreal at first...

YOU'RE
AWFUL QUIET
TODAY, JAY.

OH... I'M WORRIED
ABOUT MY POP. I'D JUST
COME IN FROM TAKING OUT
THE GARBAGE, AND SPOT,
OUR DOG, JUST WENT
CRAZY OUTSIDE. SO POP
GRABBED THE GUN AND RAN
OUT INTO THE WOODS...
YOU KNOW, THE NATIONAL
PARK THAT'S ADJACENT TO
THE SCHOOL'S WOODS? HE
WORKS THERE AS A RANGER,
AND OUR HOUSE IS RIGHT
ON THE BORDER OF THE
TWO PROPERTIES. BUT... HE
DIDN'T COME BACK UNTIL
IT WAS ALMOST
MORNING.

AS HE LEFT, HE TOLD
ME TO STAY INSIDE, AND
SHOUTED SOMETHING ELSE... I
DON'T KNOW WHAT. BUT
WHEN POP FINALLY CAME
HOME, I ASKED ABOUT SPOT
AND WHERE HE'D BEEN... HE
SEEMED SO CONFUSED FOR A
MOMENT, BEFORE SAYING
SHE'D JUMPED THE FENCE BUT
WOULD PROBABLY FIND HER
WAY HOME SOON, LIKE
NOTHING HAD HAPPENED. IT'S
NOT LIKE HIM. ALSO, THERE
WAS BLOOD ON THE LAWN
AND THE FENCE THIS
MORNING. LIKE SOMETHING
HAD GOTTEN HER.
SOMETHING'S WRONG
AND...

GAH. I'M SORRY
FAITH. I SHOULDN'T DUMP
ALL OF THIS ON YA.

OH. OH, UM... DON'T
WORRY ABOUT IT JAY.
YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY GOT
A LOT WORRYING YOU.
I HOPE IT ALL SORTS
ITSELF OUT SOON.

THANKS, FAITH.
I KNOW THAT YA'D
DO YOUR BEST TO
HELP IF THERE WAS
ANYTHING YA
COULD DO.



THERE YOU ARE! I NOTICED YOU MISSED CLASS TODAY... HAVE YOU BEEN OUT HERE THIS WHOLE TIME?

YEAH... I SAW HIM LAST NIGHT, YOU KNOW. THE WEREWOLF THAT BIT ME. THE RANGER WAS AFTER HIM, BUT MISTOOK ME FOR THAT FANGED SONOVABITCH WHEN HE CAME ACROSS ME IN THE DARK. I TRIED TO TRACK HIM DOWN AFTER WORK... BUT HIS SCENT VANISHES WHERE THE WOODS MEET THE ROAD. HE GOT AWAY.



I couldn't help but hope we caught the rogue werewolf before Gnoth decided that he needed to find and "convince" Jay nothing had happened, like whatever the Fay did to his father...

WELL, YOU GOT OUT OF IT UNHURT, SO THAT'S SOMETHING. THERE'LL BE OTHER CHANCES TO TRACK HIM DOWN. AND... OOH, HEY! HALLOWEEN IS NEXT WEEK! WE CAN GO TO SOME HAUNTS, AND CARVE PUMPKINS, AND THE LAYLINE THROWS A GREAT PARTY EVERY YEAR.

They say God works in mysterious ways. A few weeks ago, I would have told you that the werewolf that bit me had ruined my life. And he did ruin the life I thought I was going to have. In fact, last night he almost got me killed. But I did something to prevent that from happening. Which means I still have control over my life, and whether or not it's actually ruined.



Did I want to dwell on what has happened? Or did I want to look ahead and make my future something better?



...SO I THINK IT SOUNDS LIKE FUN, YOU WITH ME?



YEAH. YEAH, YOU BET I AM, YOU FREAK.

End Chapter Three: Lessons